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News Release

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Military veterans give North Kaibab trails a facelift

Fredonia, Ariz., August 26, 2015 – The Forest Service’s most recent [2015-2020 Strategic Plan](#) contains four outcome-oriented goals, one of which is to “Deliver Benefits to the Public.” Last week, recreational staff from the North Kaibab Ranger District (NKR D) of the Kaibab National Forest partnered with the Arizona Wilderness Coalition (AWC) and military-veteran volunteers to once again work toward meeting that goal by working together to maintain trails within and near the [Saddle Mountain Wilderness](#).

Since the recent June release of the new Strategic Plan, the district’s staff has taken this challenge seriously by implementing various projects throughout the summer that would help meet this strategic goal. In addition to this most recent AWC Veterans Saddle Mountain Wilderness project, other summer projects on the district include: trail, sign, and building maintenance performed by students from the local [Youth Conservation Corps](#), trail maintenance on the Rainbow Rim performed by volunteers from the American Conservation Experience and the International Mountain Bicycling Association, and prescribed fire prep work on the Tipover East prescribed fire burn unit performed by inmate fire crews from the Arizona State Forestry Division, who completed approximately 30 acres of thinning and hand piling fuel reduction work.

“For my veteran brothers and sisters, this trip was a good chance to push reality and stress aside and enjoy one of this country’s treasures, meet other veterans and make some new friends,” said U.S. Army veteran Bill Losh.

During the Saddle Mountain Wilderness project, AWC coordinator Brian Stultz and NKR D coordinator Denise Carpenter, jointly hosted ten U.S. military veteran volunteers to three days of trail maintenance and hiking followed by four nights of rest and relaxation, campfire bonding, and evening dinners consisting of burgers, pastas, fresh salads and three much-loved dutch-oven entrees cooked by Stultz.

“The cord is cut,” said Mind, Body and Resilience trainer Nick Manci, who instructed yoga and trauma release classes throughout the week. “I felt a disconnect to my world back in Phoenix. My time in the forest with no communication with anyone outside of our camp and the trail time, yoga, trauma release and meditation all played a role in my reemerging with nature. I’m once again reminded of where I’ve come from and where to find solace and peace. It took four days. I’ll return to the city tomorrow a little different man. I am thankful for my time here on the Kaibab Plateau.”

“I especially enjoyed the beauty and quiet seclusion of the wilderness,” said U.S. Marine Corps veteran John Morgan. “There was nothing but friendly and professional folks running this program, and plenty of time to myself. I think the volunteer program is a major plus and would do it again if asked.”

Throughout the week, volunteers dispersed camped in a water-and-electric free environment alongside Forest Service Road 611 just a few miles from the three trailheads. Each day, the crew started with morning yoga, breakfast and a short hike before the work of cutting trees and trail brushing began.

“I have shed a lot of military skin in the eight years since I got out,” said U.S. Marine Corps veteran Jeff Glessing. “Reconnecting with veterans who get it was a great treat for the weekend. We were able to speak freely about our

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experiences, connect over common ground and speak in acronym-filled sentences without having to decipher it for our audience.”

Throughout the days, the veteran crew worked alongside NKRD and AWC personnel. All told, they improved about 3.5 miles of the North Canyon Trail, clearing a 10-foot by 12-foot wide corridor to accommodate pack horses, and an additional 1.6 miles on the Saddle Mountain Trail. All maintenance work was done with hand tools such as the crosscut saw, bow saw, pruning saw, grub hoe, and loppers.

“It’s kind of like performing plastic surgery for the trails,” said Carpenter, a seasoned and certified crosscut sawyer. “Trail work requires many various kinds of hand tools and, to be safe and productive, trail workers must know how to select the best tools for the job and be skilled at using them. Productive trail work depends upon knowing your way around sharp tools, working together as a team and having a constant awareness of surrounding hazards, and this crew did remarkably well for their first time doing this type of work together.”

Since this particular trail maintenance was done on trails leading into and within Saddle Mountain Wilderness, the crew was prohibited from using motorized equipment within the wilderness due to the Wilderness Act of 1964 in order to provide wilderness protections for future generations.

“When everything was said and done, we were greatly supported by the AWC and USFS, who proved very knowledgeable and were willing to answer all kinds of questions about forestry, land management and ecology,” Glessing added. “We had a shared experience that is difficult to find once you leave the military. It was fun and I’ll be looking forward to my next AWC trip; hopefully, just around the corner.”

The total value of estimated volunteer hours on NKRD for the 2015 summer season is approximately \$50,000 and is listed below as follows:

- [IMBA](#) Rainbow Rim Extension project – 40 hours of donated time
- [Wilderness Volunteers](#) North Canyon Trail project – 300 hours donated
- [High Desert Backcountry Horsemen of Utah](#) Jacob Canyon Trail project – 40 hours donated
- [Arizona Trail Association](#) sign project – 80 hours donated
- [Arizona Wilderness Coalition](#) Veterans Saddle Mountain Wilderness project – 300 hours donated
- [American Conservation Experience](#) Rainbow Rim Extension project – 900 hours donated

“The Kaibab National Forest is very fortunate to have such dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers to help us maintain our recreational trails for future generations,” said NKRD Recreation Staff Officer Melissa Robinson. “All of our volunteers accomplished an exceptional amount of work in a very small timeframe, and we thank each and every volunteer for his and her commitment to helping make these improvements.”

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Volunteers take a moment to pose for a group photo before beginning their second day of trail maintenance on the Arizona Wilderness Coalition Saddle Mountain Wilderness project, August 15-19. Credit the U.S. Forest Service, Southwestern Region, Kaibab National Forest.



North Kaibab Ranger District Wilderness & Trails Technician Denise Carpenter conducts morning brief on North Canyon trail. Credit the U.S. Forest Service, Southwestern Region, Kaibab National Forest.

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Trail brushing in Saddle Mountain Wilderness. Credit the U.S. Forest Service, Southwestern Region, Kaibab National Forest.



Arizona Wilderness Coalition Veterans Saddle Mountain Wilderness project coordinator leads the crew back through the North Canyon Trail after a days work. Credit the U.S. Forest Service, Southwestern Region, Kaibab National Forest.

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Veteran volunteers participate in morning yoga with Mind, Body and Resilience trainer Nick Mancini, who also provided trauma release classes at the end of each work day. Credit the U.S. Forest Service, Southwestern Region, Kaibab National Forest.